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Trump sides with Putin, casts doubt on U.S. intel

Chris McGrath / Getty Images

President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin end their joint news conference Monday on a friendly note.

President says Russian leader was 'powerful in his denial' of meddling in U.S. election

By Julie Hirschfeld Davis
NEW YORK TIMES

HELSINKI, Finland — President Donald Trump stood next to President Vladimir Putin of Russia on Monday and publicly challenged the conclusion of his own intelligence agencies that Moscow interfered in the 2016 presidential election, wrapping up what he called a "deeply productive" summit meeting with an extraordinary show of trust for a leader accused of attacking U.S. democracy.

In a remarkable news conference, Trump did not name a single action for which Putin should be held accountable. Instead, he saved his sharpest criticism for the United States and the special counsel investigation into the election interference, calling it a "ridiculous" probe and a "witch hunt" that has kept the two countries apart.

"The president must appreciate that Russia is not our ally."

Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis.

Trump even questioned the determinations by his intelligence officials that Russia had meddled in the election.

"They said they think it's Russia," Trump said. "I have President Putin; he just said it's not Russia,"

Trump continues on A9

Stories inside

» *A woman who sought a "back channel"meeting for Trump, Putin is charged as a Russian agent.* **Page A7**

» *Some Republicans rebuke Trump; Democrats want action.* **Page A10**

Final Four returns in 2023

Winning bid adds to city's standing as host to major sports events

By Joseph Duarte

Houston and NRG Stadium on Monday were selected to host the 2023 men's Final Four, reaffirming the city's place as a regular destination for major sporting events.

College basketball's marquee event will return for the third time in a 12-year span, adding to a growing sports calendar that includes an NCAA Tournament regional at Toyota Center in 2020 and the College Football Playoff national championship game in 2024. Houston also is among 17 cities vying to host 2026 World Cup games as part of North America's winning bid.

"Houston's on a roll," said Janis Burke, chief executive officer for the Harris County-Houston Sports Authority. "We keep getting bigger, better and stronger when you look at our footprint."

The 2023 Final Four will be held April 1 and 3. It will mark the first time the event will be hosted by four Division I schools, with the University of Houston, Rice, Texas Southern and Houston Baptist sharing the honor.

This will be the fourth time Houston has hosted the Final Four. The event

Final continues on A8

Farenthold ends House career with bills, party

Instead of reimbursing taxpayers for harassment claims, he paid lawyers

By Jeremy Wallace

AUSTIN — Months after quitting Congress in the aftermath of sexual harassment claims, Blake Farenthold was still racking up legal expenses — and a substantial cocktail party bill.

Instead of reimbursing taxpayers $84,000 for sexual harassment claims he first said he would pay, the Corpus Christi Republican spent more than $100,000 from his still-active campaign account on lawyers since the start of the year, including $41,000 just since April, when he resigned.

Now he has just $3,300 left in that campaign account, making it unlikely he'll use that source to either pay back the $84,000 or the $200,000 the state paid to cover the special election prompted by his resignation. If he were to pay taxpayers back for either, it would now have to come from personal accounts. His net worth was $5.8 million in 2015, according to financial disclosure reports.

As he resigned from Congress on April 6, Farenthold used his campaign account to put down a nearly $800 deposit for a stay at an exclusive luxury resort outside of Sarasota, Fla., and then on June 22 used $860 on a cocktail party in Potomac, Md., a suburb of Washington, D.C.

Elected officials are

Farenthold continues on A8

Sun Noodle ramen factory soups up plan for Houston

Leading manufacturer of celebrated Japanese dish negotiating new site

By Paul Takahashi

Generations of college students saw ramen as a quarter-a-cup salvation, a cheap way to make it through late-night cramming. Graduates look back at the Styrofoam cups of hot noodle soup as an essential rite of passage.

But Americans increasingly are embracing the humble Japanese noodle dish as an artisan cuisine. Foodies wait in hour-long lines to slurp steaming bowls of ramen conjured up by celebrity chefs at prices that easily top $10 a bowl.

Now, one of the most revered high-end ramen makers plans to open a manufacturing plant in Houston.

The proposal by Honolulu-based Sun Noodle, which supplies fresh Japanese noodles to many of the top ramen shops in the U.S., is part of the company's continuing expansion into burgeoning markets. The company made an offer on a property in Houston after months of scouting locations. The company did not disclose the proposed plant's exact location, citing pending negotiations.

The plant would be Sun Noodle's fourth, and would serve restaurant and grocery clients in Texas and the central United States, as well as Mexico and South America where there is a growing appetite

Noodle continues on A8

Mark Mulligan / Houston Chronicle

Line cooks prepare ramen, with Sun Noodle ingredients, at Ramen Tatsu-ya in Montrose.

Suspect sought in three slayings

Police say public should stay alert for 'armed' man

By Stephen Tucker Paulsen, Samantha Ketterer and Jay R. Jordan

Authorities on Monday were hunting for a man in connection with a weeklong crime spree that includes robberies and deadly shootings at a home and two separate Houston area mattress stores.

At least three people have been fatally shot, authorities said Monday as they identified the suspect as 46-year-old Jose Gilberto Rodriguez.

Rodriguez was described as 5 feet, 7 inches tall and weighing 135 pounds. He should be considered "armed and dangerous," Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo said at the news confer-

Suspect continues on A9

NATION

Deportations halted

A federal judge orders a temporary halt to any deportations of reunited families who were separated by the Trump administration after crossing the Southwest border. **PAGE A7**

CITY | STATE

Mosque fire verdict

After a week of hearing evidence, a federal jury took less than three hours to find the man accused of burning down a Victoria mosque last year guilty of all charges. **PAGE A3**

INDEX

Business	B1	Lottery	C5
Comics	D5	Markets	B3
Crossword	D4	Obituaries	B6
Directory	A2	Sports	C1
Editorials	A11	Star	D1
Horoscope	D5	Weather	B8

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